

# the dormouse monitor

the newsletter of the national dormouse monitoring programme

people's trust for **endangered species** |



## INSIDE

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# Welcome



Welcome to the autumn 2012 edition of *The Dormouse Monitor*, we hope you enjoy reading it and if you feel inspired to send us an article for a future edition we would be delighted to feature it. Or if you have any dormouse images we could use to illustrate an issue it would be wonderful to receive them.

Please don't forget to enter your 2012 records online or send them in to us as soon as you have completed this year's nest box checks. Once all the 2012 data is in it will be analysed to see how this year's poor weather has affected numbers and the national population trend.

The variability in the British weather must be affecting our dormice. We have had variable winter temperatures, a cold and wet summer and an uncertain start, end and duration to our British summer. This makes habitat management of the woods the dormice are living in so crucial to their continued survival at a site. And what's good for dormice is also good for many other species too. If you would like a copy of our leaflet on managing woods for dormice do let us know.

Best wishes

Nida Al Fulaij  
& Susan Sharafi

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# Seven sleepy dormice

On possibly the only day it didn't rain this summer our dormouse visit to Crychan Forest (mid Wales) proved remarkably easy. Not only did we have good numbers of dormice (25 in 100 boxes) but they were all fast asleep. As every dormouse monitor knows this makes the job of weighing and sexing the animals much easier, especially when you find seven in one box!

These seven were all in torpor with weights ranging from 11.5g up to 20g. Were they a family group from last year? A check on the 2011 data revealed that in September eight active dormice were found in a box very close to this year's box of seven. Could this be the same family group?

I did not realise having so many dormice in torpor together was that unusual until PTES got in touch after seeing the photo on Brecknock Wildlife Trust's Facebook account. In that same visit we also found a group of five, two groups of three and two lots of two dormice. A volunteer who has boxes in another part of the forest had one group of six, two groups of five and one group of four. Is this unusual?

We are really pleased to be finding such high numbers of dormice in our boxes as Crychan and Halfway Forest are Forestry Commission Wales-owned conifer plantations with some remnant broad-leaved woodland in patches. We

have six monitoring sites and Brecknock Wildlife Trust is contracted by Forestry Commission Wales to monitor dormouse numbers in the forest and to provide management advice. It is only in the last three or so years that dormouse numbers in our nest boxes have really increased. Prior to the harsh winters of 2009 and 2010 we were finding lots of wood mice and very few dormice. Since those two winters wood mouse numbers have dropped dramatically and dormouse numbers have increased. Did the harsh winters help dormice by seeing off their competition?

It is also interesting to note that all the dormice we found in the June visit were

using the boxes that we had pre-seeded with hay at the start of the season. Hay was put in every other box as an experiment to try to put off nesting birds and to encourage dormice to make nests. In fact it seems to have encouraged them so much that they may have stopped making the traditional green-leaved nests.

If anyone would like to know more about this monitoring project please contact me. Thanks must be given to our dedicated volunteer dormouse monitors and to our funder Forestry Commission Wales.

Beverley Lewis  
Brecknock Wildlife Trust  
blewis@brecknockwildlifetrust.org.uk.



Ian Brooker

# International dormouse exchange: studying

Photos: Haruka Aiba and Manami Iwabuchi



Our story began ten years ago at the Hungarian dormouse conference, where I met our most well-known and beloved Japanese colleague, Professor Shusaku Minato who was busy giving dormouse pins to participants and turning them upside down, to teach his European colleagues that Japanese dormice have a very special habit of moving along branches with their heads down.

It took further conferences for the working relationship to start. I remember the UK conference in 2008, where I gave a presentation on the ecological parameters of co-existing dormice. Three dormouse species occur in Hungary – the hazel (*Muscardinus avellanarius*), the fat (*Glis glis*) and the forest dormouse (*Dryomys nitedula*), and in several habitats all three live together, even in the same vegetation plot. Professor Minato became interested in the topic and wanted to learn more about this phenomenon himself. He raised funds to visit Hungary for research purposes for several years; once on his own and also with his wife (Chise Minato) and colleagues (Haruka Aiba and Manami Iwabuchi) – five times in total.

As is usual for precise Japanese research methods, several techniques were used to gain more data and knowledge: radio-tracking, night-vision cameras and luminous bodies - or capsules – were all used to examine the nocturnal behaviour of the European dormouse species, in order to compare them with those of their Japanese relatives. Recently, the nutritional differences between the three dormouse species was

the main area of research, which included collecting droppings, looking at food remains, taking fur samples and also collecting possible sources of food such as different plants during the day and insects at night. The basis of the research was under-pinned by a long-term nest box study, which I have been running now for over 12 years. A total of approximately 400 nest boxes and nest tubes have been erected in eight different habitat types throughout an area about 30km north of Budapest.

In 2010, at the 10th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP10), I had the chance to visit Japan myself. Shusaku organised several events and a booth at the COP10 to showcase aerial animal pathways. Pat and Mary Morris also visited Japan on this occasion and spoke at these events. After COP10 Shusaku invited us to give a talk to the students and staff of the Kiyosato Educational Experiment Project which also gave us the opportunity to visit the world famous Dormouse Museum.

You can read endless articles about foreign countries, but being there allows you to really experience and understand the little differences. For example, if we hone it down to our narrow topic, dormouse research, even though the main research methods may be similar, there are always small variations. I was amazed by the dormouse rescue centre, which gives shelter to dozens of injured or rescued dormice – my only chance to see a live Japanese dormouse. Though we carried out several nest box

# dormice in Japan and Hungary

checks, as often happens in nature, we only found nests in the boxes, no animals. The dormouse nests we found also had similarities to those found in Hungary, but due to the availability of different vegetation, the materials differ in many ways. Just to mention one example: tree bark is a typical material used by dormice in Japan, but in Hungary this is replaced (in the case of hazel dormice) by dry grass.

The analysis of all this accrued information is being processed and will hopefully be published in a peer-reviewed journal. But the scientific findings are only one part of the equation. A strong friendship has evolved through this close collaboration, which cannot be described by any statistical analysis or data processing. We have had a very special experience

which will last in our memories for a very long time.

Kristóf Hecker & Shusaku Minato

Professor Shusaku Minato works at the Kiyosato Educational Experiment Project and is Director of the Dormouse Museum in Kiyosato, Yamanashi prefecture and Professor of Kwansei Gakuin University in Nishinomiya Hyogo prefecture.

Kristóf Hecker is the Division Coordinator of the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC), based in Budakeszi, Hungary.

## FACT FILE Japanese dormouse

The only species of dormouse to be found in Japan, and endemic to the country, the Japanese dormouse is unlike any other due to its curious habit of running along the underside of branches upside down.



**PHYSICAL:** soft hazel or brown fur with a dark dorsal stripe.

**HABITS:** hibernate during cold weather or times of little food.

**BREEDING:** Males mate with several females that produce a litter of about four in June/July.

**BEHAVIOUR:** solitary, nocturnal and highly arboreal. Both sexes are vocal during mating.

**FEEDING:** omnivorous, eats seeds, fruit, insects and birds eggs. They store food in their nests for later use.



# How can dormice climb in the dark? Insights

I am a researcher in the Active Touch Laboratory at the University of Sheffield. I work with a group of researchers, led by Tony Prescott, and our research focuses on a very special touch system – the whisker touch system in mammals. Every mammal (apart from humans and some primates) has whiskers, but only some animals move their whiskers so they can actively feel around their environments; we call these animals ‘whisker specialists’. Through my work I have been fortunate enough to encounter and film quite a few of these whisker specialists, including harbour seals, rats and mice, but recently I found a new and exciting whisker specialist to add to my list – the dormouse.

I work closely with the Wildwood Trust in Kent, where we are lucky to have some research space on site with access to their great staff and animals. We have previously filmed water

shrews, water voles, bats, rats, and many species of mouse at Wildwood. But what was really exciting on this particular trip, which we made last summer, was that we were planning to film climbing dormice for the very first time.

I am sure that if you look closely at dormice, one of the first things you can’t help but notice is their huge whiskers. Dormice actually move these long whiskers forwards and backwards really fast, in a movement called ‘whisking’. This can occur at around 15 times per second! Therefore, we film using a high-speed video camera at 500 frames per second so we can get really lovely, clear footage of dormice whisking. In addition, we film in the dark using infrared lighting to make everything as natural as possible for the animals.

We notice, when we look at our videos, that not only do the dormice whisk their whiskers back and forth really fast, but they also use them to feel in front of

themselves when they climb and walk about. We can see in the picture below that the dormouse pushes its whiskers really far forward when it climbs, much more so than the rat, who is another whisker specialist. We think that because the dormouse is a nocturnal climber, it might be using its sense of touch – its whiskers – to feel around in the dark as it climbs. In particular, it might scan ahead with its whiskers to find good footholds.

Our work with dormice is still very much in its infancy. We have built some more climbing arenas and hope to collect some more dormouse footage in the future. We are really interested in identifying the whisker strategies that the dormice employ to make themselves such agile, nocturnal climbers. In addition we also need to quantify the whisker and climbing behaviours that we see. We do this by using a ‘whisker tracking programme’, which is a

specialist bit of software that measures the angles and speeds of whisker and head movements.

We think that understanding more about how the dormouse senses and navigates around its environment could give key insights into the ecology of the species. For example, we could look at how the animals use their whiskers to cross between different branches, measuring the size of the gaps that they are able to cross. This might be useful when designing dormouse corridors and bridges. While dormice are often thought to be relatively averse to crossing hedgerow gaps, we observed the animals exploring gaps and crossing between them relatively regularly.

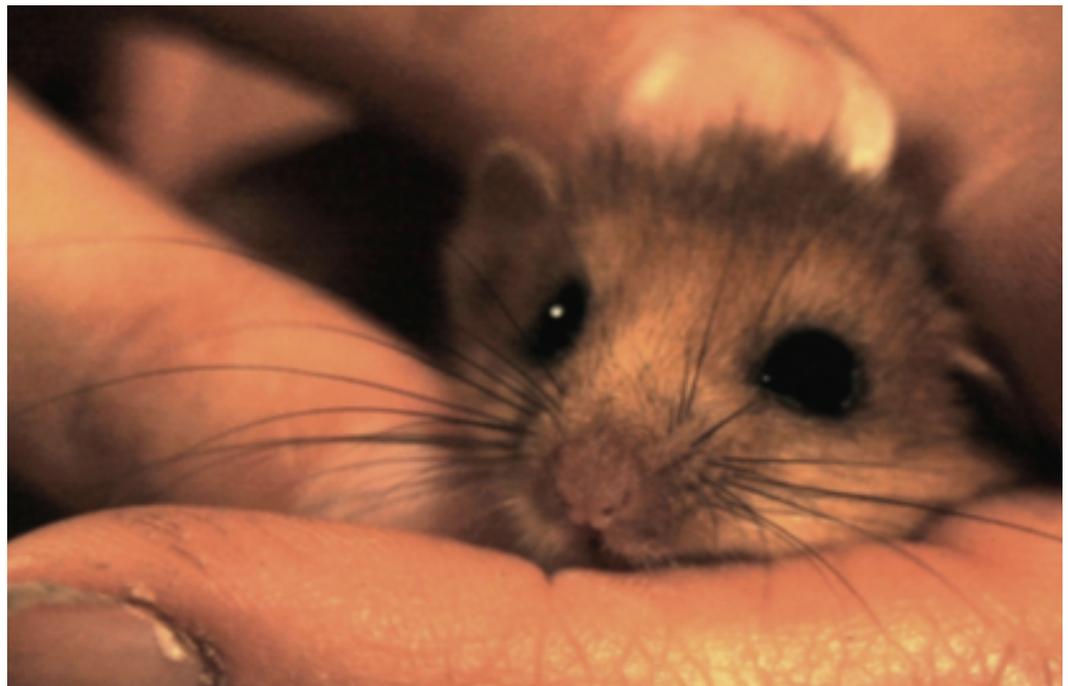
We have had a lot of success with our first pilot studies, and our footage really shows dormice to be tactile specialists, exploring their environment actively with their highly-developed sense of touch. You may



# into dormouse whiskers

have even seen some of our footage on BBC *Springwatch* recently, as they ran a feature on our work. We are really pleased that the public can get to see dormice climbing and exploring around, rather than just sleeping, which so often is the only thing they see! We think that our footage gives new and exciting glimpses into the lives of dormice, and I am sure that we will be sharing some more exciting thoughts on dormice whiskers with you again soon.

Robyn Grant  
University of Sheffield



Robyn Grant

## Dormouse nests in strange places

South East Water staff have been monitoring dormice at Arlington Reservoir in East Sussex for a couple of years. It is entirely man-made and before its construction in 1971 the site was an arable farm. Consequently all the habitat enhancements - planting woodland species, coppicing and laying hazel hedges - have been carried out from scratch.

Last year four baby dormice were found on site but then

Ranger Simon Lohrey got more than he bargained for during a routine Health & Safety check. He discovered two dormice inside the lifebelt housing. Simon said: "They gave me quite a shock, I've never found anything like a dormouse in one of these before."

The dormice had made their nest in the bottom right hand corner of the plastic housing just below the lifesaving equipment.

The hedge behind the lifebelt was planted seven years ago to link up the woodland blocks around the site - it is very pleasing to know this has worked. The lifebelt housing they were found in sits right against the hedge so is relatively easy to access. However they would still need to get to the inspection slits at the front of the housing.

Richard Dyer  
Senior Environmental  
Officer, South East Water

The photos below were taken in early May 2012 on a busy trunk road in Devon. I always thought that dormice would stay away from the edge of road verges during the hibernation period as it is exposed and tends to get sprayed with salty water. The nest was very well insulated and bigger than any other hibernation nest I have seen and the woven grassy core was unmistakable.

Although the chosen site might put off potential predators, it also makes any dormice hibernating

here vulnerable to traffic and grass cutting. Many hibernation nests I've found have been outside woodlands in nearby areas of rough grassland, heather, bracken and/or bramble. With little or no ground layer in the nearby woods perhaps the verge is more attractive for hibernation. Apparently it may take more than heavy lorries to wake them up from their deep sleep!

Leo Gubert  
Ecological Consultant

Richard Dyer



# Okehampton Primary School project

The children at Okehampton Primary have fallen in love with dormice. Following a year's whole-school project, pupils, members of staff and our wider school community have been touched by the beauty and scarcity of this diminutive mammal!

We are fortunate in Okehampton to have a small but thriving population of hazel dormice in many of our surrounding woodlands. We also have a number

of dormouse experts that have been able to educate and inspire us to appreciate our dormouse population and their habitats.

Our school is the largest primary school in Devon (currently 630 pupils) and cross-curricular, whole-school projects are logistically challenging. Indeed, this is the first project of its kind for our school. Throughout

the past year we have been learning about the ecology and conservation of the hazel dormouse and its associated woodland habitats. As a result we have made new and lasting relationships with many external organisations and have supported them with practical work. The list of our associates includes People's Trust for Endangered Species, National Trust, Woodland Trust,

Dartmoor National Park, Devon Mammal Society, Devon Hedges, Hedgeline, Green Veins and Lanes, Highways Agency, Okehampton Dormouse Monitoring Group, Devon Wildlife Trust, Paignton Zoo and local ecologists.

Our project was given an exciting boost in September by the arrival of Dora, the three-legged dormouse. A local hedges and dormouse enthusiast Paula Wolton spent the entire day showing Dora to as many children as possible whilst Dora slept through most of the excitement. (Paula looks after Dora as part of the dormouse captive breeding programme at Paignton Zoo). Children from Nursery up to Year 6 were all able to experience, first hand, what a dormouse looks like, how small it is and how cute it is when curled up asleep creating a lasting impression

on us all. The ecology of the dormouse and its habitat is only one aspect of our project. To enhance our learning we decided at the onset of the project that we wanted to have something tangible to share with our learning community; we wanted to write a children's book about a Devonshire dormouse! So we set about the ambitious task of inspiring our pupils to write and illustrate it. We hope that eventually we can submit our story to a publisher but, in the meantime, we plan to print the book in-house to help raise the funds needed for professional editing and publishing.

Learning about dormice has been stimulating, absorbing and fun. The project will continue this academic year with nest box making at our local college, nest box erection at local



# Putting down new roots



sites and, of course, the completion of the story. We also plan to present an evening of dance carried out by some of our younger children. Children and parents will also read their own wonderful dormouse poetry. And there will be a performance of a fabulous dormouse poem that was written for us by our local story teller Clive, who has also been involved in the project.

July this year finished with a flourish as we are thrilled to say that we were awarded 2nd place in the annual Royal Forestry Society's Schools Excellence Award for our work on the ecological importance of Devon's hedgerows and their role in supporting dormice. We also received a Highly Commended Award for the Total Green School's Award for our work.

We greatly look forward to finishing our book this year

and hope that the finished product will help to spread our enthusiasm for the hazel dormouse far and wide.

Frances Rickwood  
Teaching Assistant  
Okehampton Primary School

Dormice are thriving in a Peterborough wood - and now a local farmer is helping them to branch out even further afield.

The Forestry Commission found 27 dormice in boxes in Bedford Purlieus Wood, near Peterborough, during the final monthly check of the year in October. Adults, juveniles and babies were recorded, most in good health and with plenty of fat to see them through their winter hibernation.

The dormice were released into the 200 hectare woodland in 2001 as part of the species recovery programme to restore the species to its former range.

Cheryl Joyce, Forestry Commission ranger, said: "Finding so many dormice in our final check is great news. But what has really excited us is that some animals were found a long way from the original release point, adding to our hopes that they might soon spread into the surrounding countryside. That really is the next major project landmark. It just shows what sensitive habitat management allied to the passion of volunteers can

achieve."

Spurred on by the dormouse revival, Clive Fuller from 1,150 acre Cross Leys Farm, is working with Cambridgeshire Wildlife Trust and volunteers to erect boxes in hedgerows in his fields bordering Bedford Purlieus Wood.

Clive explained: "Our tall hedgerows have been carefully managed as we have been in stewardship schemes and provide vital wildlife havens. The Wildlife Trust asked me to help by putting up boxes in two long stretches of hedgerows running in different directions from Bedford Purlieus Wood. I'm only too delighted to help. The dormice have done well and I would love for them to spread through the area."

The original reintroduction at Bedford Purlieus was organised by Natural England and PTES, working in partnership with the Forestry Commission. The wood was declared a National Nature Reserve in 2000 in recognition of its importance as a species-rich semi-natural ancient woodland.

Pat Morris



# Welsh dormice and other mammals

I currently monitor the dormouse boxes we have installed within Waun Las National Nature Reserve at the National Botanic Garden of Wales. Back in 2009, whilst volunteering for Natasha De Vere, the Head of Conservation and Research at the Garden, an opportunity to help check some dormouse boxes arose. Many of the boxes had been in position for a number of years, but approximately 90 boxes, which had been donated to the Garden by RSK Carter Ecological, had been installed by a previous volunteer in 2008. So under the watchful eye of Anna Hobbs, a volunteer and dormouse licence holder, I quickly learnt how to check the boxes and to confidently record their contents. Due to the apparent lack of dormice at the Garden, I began learning to handle small mammals by handling wood mice, successfully managing to avoid getting bitten by the lively rodents.

I also started helping monitor some boxes at Rhos Cefn Bryn, a site in

Carmarthenshire managed by The Wildlife Trust for South & West Wales. There I had the opportunity to see and handle dormice for the first time, and instantly fell in love with them. Dormice are very elusive mammals, but under the tuition of Jacqueline Hartley, a local ecologist and fellow dormouse enthusiast, I slowly gained confidence in handling these wonderful creatures.

I soon registered the Waun Las NNR with the National Dormouse Monitoring Project (NDMP) run by PTES, and with the help of volunteers began checking the boxes on a monthly basis. I now regularly check over 100 boxes within the Waun Las NNR. Wood mice are regularly found using the boxes, often with up to six found in one nest. Birds also use the nest boxes during the spring, and pipistrelle bats have been recorded using the boxes on two occasions. Although a small number of signs had been found, in the form of chewed hazelnuts, no dormice had

ever been seen. But that was set to change.

During the first check of 2012, in March, a dormouse nest was identified in one of the boxes. There was no doubt that dormice were there, and they had come across our boxes and were using them for the first time.

During the April visit, when we finally arrived at the box that the nest had been found in previously, I was very pleased to discover a male dormouse in the nest. It was in torpor and had no intention of waking up to say 'hello!' It was a relatively good weight of 19g, which leads us to believe that it possibly came out of hibernation prematurely during the very warm weather we experienced in February. It is thought that it was then forced back into a form of torpor due to the very cold and wet weather that followed.

There is still so much to learn about dormice, and we can assume all sorts of things, but regular monitoring like this, where data feeds into the NDMP, is

a valuable tool to help assess what they are doing around the county and the UK as a whole, and will hopefully help us to help them.

Volunteers at the Garden have been busily creating new boxes with a grant received from PTES. These have now been installed in other woodlands around the Waun Las NNR, to increase the monitoring effort, and hopefully help us to find more dormice.

This find is a positive indicator of the status of the dormouse in Carmarthenshire. Another record of the species in such an important area such as the Waun Las NNR at the Gardens will help to raise the profile of the dormouse in Carmarthenshire, and help to back up the tireless work and effort put in by many people in the area to monitor and protect this wonderful and elusive species.

Rhian Lewis  
Volunteer, National Botanic Garden of Wales



# New dormouse training material



a training course. We are also making a series of videos ranging from health and safety to checking a box with multiple active dormice. These will be available on the website to help the trainers and as refreshers for the monitors.

In April there were lots of comments on the forum about the difficulty of sexing dormice. In response we were able to put out a request for photos and we put together a short presentation to

It began with a concerned monitor posting a message on the forum querying how to catch and weigh the dormice running around in the bottom of his bag. Sexing them seemed completely impossible. This alerted us, here at PTES, to the need for some extra help for monitors to help build up both skills and confidence.

There are some excellent training programmes, developed by local dormouse groups including Kent, Surrey and Cheshire, and while these work well locally there appeared to be a training and skill gap at a national level. Looking through the biometric dormouse data within the NDMP there are some startling gaps. The data recorded include 'sex', 'activity', 'weight', 'breeding condition' and 'age'. Where 'sex' or 'weight' are not recorded it implies that either the animals were too young to sex or weigh, they escaped, or the monitor lacked the confidence to handle or reliably sex the animals. One would expect,

over a large sample size, that the proportion of young animals and the proportion of escapees would remain relatively constant. The number of records with either no 'sex' or no 'weight' has been relatively stable since 1988, but unfortunately the number of records where neither 'sex' nor 'weight' has been recorded has been rising steadily. This implies that an increasing number of monitors are unable to handle and sex dormice confidently and that there was a greater need to improve training for dormouse workers.

Working with CCW and NE, PTES collated the existing training material from local dormouse groups to produce the Dormouse Training Log. It took a while, longer in fact than the Health Reform Bill to meander its way through parliament but, finally, in April 2012 there was a version that everyone liked. So now when we are asked the question by future dormouse workers 'what do I need to do to get my dormouse licence?', the log

lists the skills you would be expected to acquire and a place where experience can be recorded.

The next job was to ensure that consistent information is provided at dormouse training events. A number of organisations like The Mammal Society, Wildlife Trusts and IEEM run these events but as PTES maintains the NDMP and engages with monitors through the forum it is well placed to provide an overview of the state of the nation's dormice. A series of presentations and associated notes on dormouse ecology, conservation, legislation, how to enter data into the NDMP and other information was created.

The aim has been to provide material to help trainers provide a more consistent dormouse course. It is recognised that a good training course gives the trainee both the benefit of the trainers experience in the field and often their first sighting of a dormouse. It is strongly advised that anyone wishing to work towards their licence attends

make it easier for monitors in the field to sex dormice. The best photograph was from Chester but they cheated a bit – the animals were anaesthetised, making it so much easier to sex them.

All the above information and more is available on the PTES website. There is information on woodland management but this is certainly an area that we would like to develop more. We are currently linking with other conservation organisations to try and develop both generic woodland management practices that benefit the widest range of species and means by which they can be demonstrated.

If you have anything that you think would be helpful to others, might help dormouse conservation in Britain and should be on the website, please let us know.

Ian White, Dormouse Officer  
People's Trust for  
Endangered Species

[www.ptes.org/  
dormousetraining](http://www.ptes.org/dormousetraining)

# How to start a dormouse support group

The Warwickshire Dormouse Conservation Group was created in December 2009 to support the objectives of the county's Common Dormouse Local Action Plan, including finding out if Warwickshire had more sites than the one known natural population at Weston Wood. Since then the group has grown to an impressive 48 members, at least half of whom are actively involved in fieldwork, and 27 'friends' who receive the newsletters without being harassed for help! The youngest 'friend' is Bethany, an 11 year old guide who has chosen to study dormice for her 'animal active' badge. The group is supported by Warwickshire County Council's Biological Record Centre.

Having resolved to start such a group when I retired from my job as Local Biodiversity Action Plan Co-ordinator, I sent an email outlining my ideas to local professional and amateur contacts - thank goodness I had kept my address book. To my surprise I had a huge response and was further fortunate in that the first assignment was a

very exciting one – assisting the release of captive-bred dormice in Warwickshire. Our first task was putting up nest boxes. It was very cold but members seemed to enjoy it. After all the snow we had had it was nice to wake up on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January and find it had all disappeared, leaving a beautiful crisp morning. What better way to spend it than helping with a bit of dormouse conservation. Many people joined the first event of the group, which was a great opportunity to meet other volunteers who had all been kind enough to sacrifice their lie-in for the sake of a small rodent that would spend half its life snoring away.

This was followed by the installation of 300 nest tubes in four woodlands in the spring and the subsequent checking of them in the autumn, at the same time carrying out nut hunts at other woods. At this point the group became dependent on help from members with dormouse handling licences. The survey programme was based on a report completed after the Warwickshire Dormouse

Survey 1999 and the subsequent Strategy for the Conservation of Dormice in Warwickshire 2001, both by Dr. Stefan Bodnar for Natural England.

Co-ordination of the groups' activities is carried out by email and short newsletters, each of which so far has had the names of at least two new members. There is currently no website it would be a great thing to have if someone had the time to manage it.

Despite finding no new dormouse sites yet, three years on, the group has had other successes. Field work in the first year involved 29 members carrying out 55 visits to eight locations which was a fantastic commitment and led to subsequent networking between people who might otherwise not have met. The creation of the group has also spawned several surveys by local wildlife groups and one individual survey for an MSc dissertation.

There have been some amusing moments too. Grey squirrels provided us with a challenge at the 2009 reintroduction

site by chewing the cable ties which held shut the feeding doors. Assuming that the interference had been carried out by 'do-gooders' we posted hand-written messages on the cages, asking people to leave them alone. We then replaced the cable ties with metal clips only to find that these too were opened. Only agricultural D-clips foiled the attackers, which we finally realised were squirrels - judging from the tooth marks on the chewed original cable clips!

How are members motivated? This has never been a problem as there are now probably more members than dormice in the county. Most of the members are ecologists or naturalists and therefore well motivated. They are also busy people but pleased to help out with fieldwork as it gives them an opportunity to get away from their desks and into the woods. If this were not the case then regular meetings with speakers might be necessary but there has been no demand for meeting purely socially. There is however no break in the conversation while members are working!

How often does the group meet? The frequency of meetings is dictated by the field work that needs doing in accordance with the aims of the group - i.e. to survey as many of Warwickshire's woodlands as possible through nut hunts and install nest tubes where it seems possible there may be dormice present. This is essentially in the autumn and spring which seems to suit the members, many of whom are busy with their consultancy work throughout the summer. Weekends seem the most



popular times – with buns at coffee time – but the feeding of the reintroduced dormice during the summer months was a weekday activity as well. No problems getting help for that job, not surprisingly, as in the early weeks the dormice were still in the cages and often seen.

How is the work of the group funded? There is no fee for membership which keeps it simple though has the disadvantage that members cannot claim for transport. This could however be changed by becoming affiliated to a money-holding organisation such as a local Wildlife Trust. The only materials needed so far are nest tubes – the first 200 nest tubes were made out of Tetrapak cartons (details can be supplied – very time consuming and do not last more than two seasons), another 100 were bought with a grant from PTES, 50 were given in gratitude for help with the reintroduction and 30 donated by a consultant.

WDCG nut hunting, painting tetra-pak nest tubes and putting them up in the woods

The group now has only 180 nest tubes in the field although it will be expanding fieldwork in 2012 through the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust Princethorpe Woodlands Project funded by both SITA and PTES. Should a new site be found then funding would have to be sought to buy nest boxes.

I hope that the group continues to go from strength to strength, as I hope the dormouse population of Warwickshire will too.

Ruth Moffat,  
Warwickshire  
Dormouse  
Conservation Group



Photos: K Martin, J Underhill, R Moffat

## SUSSEX HELPERS WANTED

In 2009 we had a dozen or so NDMP sites in Sussex so we organised a meeting of existing dormouse licence holders to set up the Sussex Dormouse Network. The idea was that we could train new surveyors, share information about making/sourcing boxes, and set up more NDMP sites to find out more about how the species is faring in Sussex. So we set up a Google Group e-forum in order to keep in contact and the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre funded two training courses, one at Wakehurst Place and one at Mallydams Wood, with 38 people attending overall. We then developed a 'buddy' system where beginners were linked with experienced licence holders in order to help get their licences.

In 2010 six people, who had nearly enough experience to get their licences, attended a handling course at Wildwood Discovery Park to give them that little extra experience that they needed. And 24 people attended 'Dormouse Fest' on the Isle of Wight, which I organised in conjunction with Ian White from PTES. Valuable experience was gained at PTES's Bridesford Woods. We learnt about handling, field craft and woodland management to help dormice.

Gradually newly licenced people began to set up more NDMP sites in Sussex. There are still quite a few people getting experience and we're hoping more volunteers will get their licences soon. We have a keen member who is making hundreds of

nest boxes and has offered to help set up new NDMP sites to target areas of under-recorded areas, especially in mid-Sussex.

In autumn 2011 we organised a social 'Dormice and Hedges' evening, where 50 surveyors and Sussex Hedgerow Inventory Project surveyors came along to hear all about local and national projects. We now have over 45 NDMP sites in Sussex, and new sites are popping up as I write!

If you would like to be involved with the Sussex Dormouse Network then please email [pennygreen@sussexwt.org.uk](mailto:pennygreen@sussexwt.org.uk) or call 01273 497521. We are always looking for licence holders who are happy to take out newbies, so any help is welcome.

# Branching out: planting trees for less

Do you know anyone with dormice present on their land who may be interested in planting trees to extend their habitat? If they live in Surrey, Sussex, Kent or Hampshire, then the Woodland Trust's pilot 'MOREwoods for dormice' grant may be the perfect opportunity.

## How does MOREwoods for dormice work?

Working in partnership with the People's Trust for Endangered Species, the Woodland Trust is offering to support people through every stage of creating new woodland. It starts with a visit from your local woodland creation adviser, Luke Everitt, to check the

proposed land is suitable for planting and to talk about possible site designs. Careful thought is then put into the planting plan to make sure the design delivers the greatest benefits for dormice and, in time, flourishes into woodland the owner will be proud of. A mix of native species favoured by dormice are chosen to ensure the new wood is as wildlife friendly as possible.

If the site is suitable, the Woodland Trust can provide support for up to 80% of the cost of trees and necessary protection, meaning that creating new woodland is an affordable, stress-free and rewarding experience. And with expert advice on aftercare and maintenance, people are left with a

beautiful new young wood that both they and dormice can enjoy for years to come.

## Create something special for the future

Lorna and Dave Rowney-Smith in East Sussex were the first to take advantage of this great offer. They planted 1,300 native trees on a field alongside Denture Shaw, a small area of ancient woodland already populated by dormice at Hugget's Furnace Farm. The new trees will increase the total amount of woodland and help dormice move through the landscape to other nearby woods and hedges.

"Dave has always wanted to plant a wood but we thought it would be too expensive to do" says Lorna. "The MOREwoods scheme gave us the advice and grant access we needed,

and has helped us enhance habitat for a whole host of wildlife, not just dormice. What's good for dormice is also good for so many other species."

## Hurry - don't miss out

This generous offer can't last forever so people interested in planting trees are encouraged to talk to the Woodland Trust or PTES as soon as possible. As this is only a pilot scheme, if it is successful there may be the opportunity to extend it into other counties but only if there is demand.

If you are interested in planting woodland for dormice and wildlife, or if you'd like to create a new wood for other reasons such as firewood, please contact Luke Everitt on 0845 293 5689. You can also email [morewoods@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:morewoods@woodlandtrust.org.uk) or visit [woodlandtrust.org.uk/morewoods](http://woodlandtrust.org.uk/morewoods).



# Donkeys and dormice in Devon

The Donkey Sanctuary, just outside Sidmouth, is the largest donkey sanctuary in the world, currently caring for more than 2,000 donkeys on some 1,200 acres located in the heart of the East Devon AONB. When people first think of the sanctuary the image that springs to mind tends to be of our more elderly charges, stoically seeing out their years safe from the demands of overwork or out-and-out cruelty. Less appreciated is the fact that the Sanctuary is also home to a wealth of wildlife and it was with this in mind that my appointment was made.

I started at the charity in November 2011, after working for the local Countryside Service for six years. My role is, in part, to develop projects connected with the farms owned by The Donkey Sanctuary and, after a very short scrabble and search below a hazel stool for nibbled nuts, I knew that dormice would play an important part in this work.

The old hedgerows within the Weston Valley, along with an old coppice, small wet woodland and secondary ash woodland here at the charity's main site at Slade

House Farm, are littered with dormouse-nibbled hazelnuts and, with over 250,000 visitors to this site every year, it offers an amazing opportunity to engage with people about wildlife conservation.

East Devon is fortunate to have a number of very knowledgeable mammal ecologists working commercially and voluntarily within its bounds, many of whom I have been lucky enough to work with in previous conservation roles. To get The Donkey Sanctuary's dormouse monitoring project underway I sought the guidance of licensed dormouse surveyor Adrian Bayley to co-ordinate the project, with as much support and practical assistance as was needed from me, operating as his trainee.

Adrian and I agreed that public engagement as well as formal education would underpin as much of the monitoring project as was feasible. This ethos started at the very beginning, with visitors to the Sanctuary during the school summer holidays being invited to make their own dormouse

nest box from kits fabricated by the charity's carpenter. Each kit is pre-cut and pre-drilled and takes about 10 minutes to screw together for most families, providing enough of a challenge to be rewarding, without proving a tiresome distraction from their visit!

Once made, these boxes were destined for use in the project, each numbered box being 'adopted' by the family who made it. Box makers, as well as other interested parties who come on board as the project grows, will receive an e-newsletter to inform them of how the scheme is faring and highlighting opportunities to get involved further.

So, that resolved the issue of creating our first 50 boxes for the scheme.

The boxes have been located in woodland away from our main visitor site, distributed in a 5x10 grid with boxes placed every 20 metres within the grid. The chosen woodland contains old unworked hazel coppice, a small coupe of sweet chestnut plantation, small conifer plantation, but mainly secondary woodland with occasional veteran trees and is part of a larger

mixed woodland of some 46 hectares owned entirely by the charity known as Lower Chelston Wood.

This initial wooden box scheme will be supported by two further tube schemes aimed at evaluating the value of the Sanctuary's hedgerows to dormice, with the tubes once again made with volunteer assistance.

Adrian will lead a core team of volunteer trainees to conduct the dormouse monitoring project in accordance with the standard PTES guidelines, with the project affording local volunteers the ability to work towards licenses of their own. As the box scheme matures, it is hoped that small groups of local people will be able to join the team on survey days and get a first-hand introduction to the world of this fascinating mammal.

James Chubb  
Events & Activities Manager  
The Donkey Sanctuary,  
Sidmouth

For more information, please email [james.chubb@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](mailto:james.chubb@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk) or call on 01395 573162.



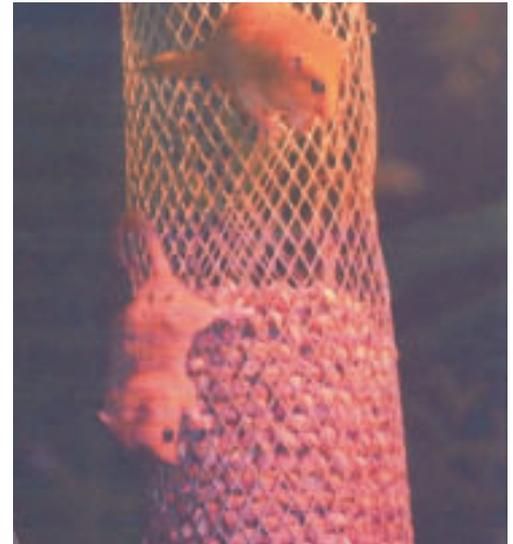
# And finally...

Do you ever have an idea or question about dormouse monitoring, conservation or research that you would like to discuss with or ask other dormouse monitors? Or news about your project that you would like to share? If you do then please sign up for the NDMP dormouse google forum. Once you've joined the group you simply post a question and wait for the responses. There are currently over 350 members of the forum, so there's no better audience for your dormouse dilemmas. To join the forum, please email [susan.sharafi@ptes.org](mailto:susan.sharafi@ptes.org).

## DORMICE ON BIRD FEEDERS

This year has been an odd one. We surveyed 68 boxes and 28 tubes in June, July, September and October and didn't find a nest or dormouse in any. However we've had just as many on our feeders as in past years and found two natural sites in bramble, so they are obviously about.

David Bannister, Devon



AND FINALLY, what do you give a dormouse enthusiast for Christmas or their birthday? What about a beautiful solid silver hazelnut pendant?

PTES has a small number of these limited edition nuts remaining from our *Great Nut Hunt* promotion and we are offering them to *Dormouse Monitor* readers. The nuts were specially commissioned and only 20 were made so they are very collectable as well as beautiful. The silver hazelnut costs £49.99 including p&p.



Each one costs just £2.50 and is blank inside for your own message.

For more information or to place an order please email [Susan.sharafi@ptes.org](mailto:Susan.sharafi@ptes.org).

Or why not buy one of our dormouse greeting cards?

